

Claim Amendments

1.-3. (Canceled)

4. (Currently amended) A biodegradable plant shell that integrally incorporates its own growing media in a peripheral wall of the shell, the peripheral wall having a hollow interior in which a plant is inserted, the wall having a substantial thickness and being formed substantially exclusively of natural biodegradable constituents, the constituents including a particulate an organic base material and comprising particular components that are held together by a combination of pressure and a water responsive glue, the shell being molded with sufficient porosity to permit root and water penetration into the walls of the shell, the glue shell being formed such that it causes the shell to retain retains its shape for storage and handling but permits the shell to disintegrate disintegrates rapidly in the presence of water so as to facilitate root penetration through the wall and facilitate plant use of the water and nutrients retained in the shell, the major portion of the shell comprising the particulate organic base material in combination with organic ingredients that enhance water retention capabilities of the shell and time release nutrients in effective amounts to support initial plant development after a plant has been planted in the shell, the shell ingredients being compressed together sufficiently that the shell holds its shape when dry but is sufficiently porous that the shell permits root and water permeation therethrough but has substantial water retention capabilities, the shell comprising by volume at least about 50% of a particulate base material including one or a combination of southern pine bark and rice hulls.

5. (Previously presented) A plant shell as in claim 4 wherein the shell includes effective quantities of peat moss, manure and top soil.

6. (Original) A plant shell as in claim 5 wherein the shell includes a time release fertilizer.

7. (Previously presented) A plant shell as in claim 4 wherein the shell has a standard size outer shape such that the shell fits in standard size temporary plastic plant pots of the type that are used by nurseries.

8. (Previously presented) A plant shell as in claim 11 wherein the shell has a standard size interior recess that is shaped such that plant contents developed in certain standard size temporary plastic pots will fit closely into the recess in the shell.

9. (Original) A plant shell as in claim 8 wherein the plant shell contains sufficient nutrients and water retention characteristics that the shell provides a desirable nutrition and water retention environment while a new plant is becoming established in a new environment.

10. (Previously presented) A biodegradable plant shell according to claim 16 wherein the glue comprises guar gum, corn starch or a combination thereof.

11. (Previously presented) A biodegradable plant shell according to claim 16 wherein the shell components are compressed in a mold at a pressure such that the shell walls are stable while dry, but the shell walls are sufficiently porous to permit water and root permeation into the walls of the shell, such that the shell structure breaks down substantially within a month in the presence of moisture.

12. (Previously presented) A biodegradable plant shell according to claim 16 wherein the shell is integrally molded in the presence of the glue under a pressure that is low enough that the shell retains sufficient porosity that water will permeate the shell when applied to a plant that is planted in the shell, the shell being formed from components and compressed at a pressure that is such that the shell retains at least about twenty percent (20%) of the water applied to it.

13. (Previously presented) A biodegradable plant shell according to claim 16 wherein the shell has a water retention capability of 30-40%.

14.-15. (Canceled)

16. (Currently amended) A biodegradable plant shell comprising a mixture of components including a base material comprising one or a combination of shredded pine bark and rice hulls, in combination with one or more elements selected from the group consisting of peat moss, manure, top soil, and time-release nutrients, held together by a combination of pressure and a water soluble tackifier or glue, with the components being mixed and compressed in the shape of a plant pot having relatively thick walls, the walls being compressed sufficiently that the shell retains its shape when dry, the walls being sufficiently porous to permit root and water permeation during plant development while still having substantial water retention capabilities, the walls being subject to rapid deterioration in the presence of moisture, the walls of the shell being sufficiently thick and containing sufficient growing media to support plant growth until the plant can become established in the ground, without the necessity for administration of additional soil conditioners or nutrients when the plant is first planted.

17. (Previously presented) A biodegradable plant shell according to claim 16 wherein the components are present in the following percentages by volume:

southern pine bark and/or rice hulls: 50 to 100%  
peat moss: 0 to 30%  
manure: 0 to 30%  
top soil: 0 to 30%

18. (Previously presented) A biodegradable plant shell according to claim 16 wherein the components are present in approximately the following approximate percentages by volume:

southern pine bark: 70%  
peat moss: 10%  
manure: 10%  
top soil: 10%

19. (Currently amended) A plant shell according to ~~claim 1~~ claim 16 wherein the particulate organic material comprises in large part chunks or particles no greater than about one-quarter (1/4) inch in diameter.